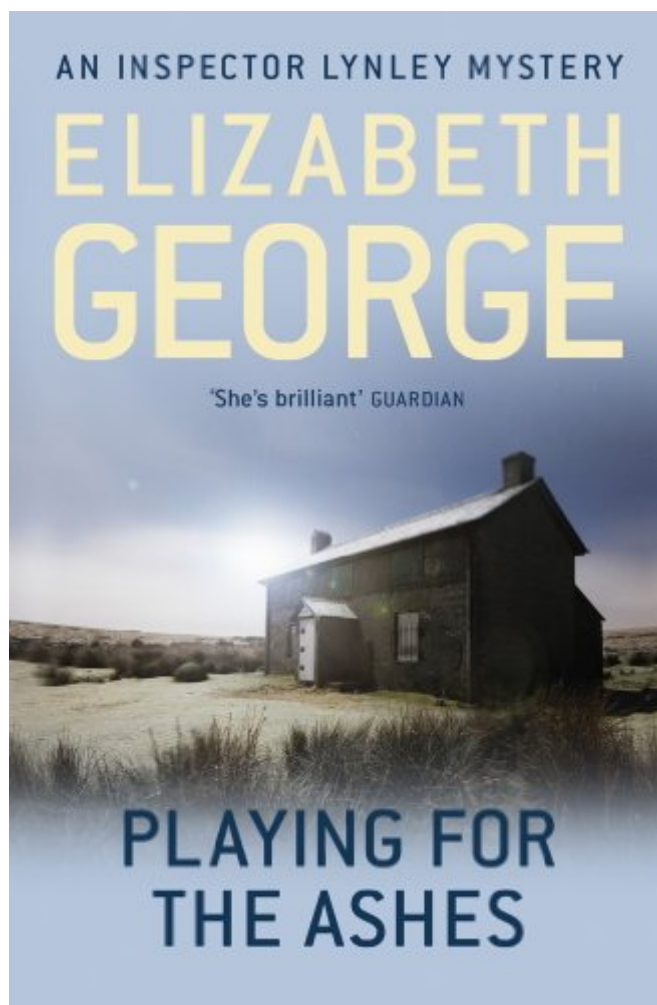


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# Playing For The Ashes: An Inspector Lynley Novel: 7



## Synopsis

When the body of England's leading batsman, Kenneth Fleming, is discovered in the burnt-out shell of a country cottage, it looks like a clear-cut case of arson. Further investigation reveals an almost embarrassing multitude of suspects for murder: from Fleming's lover to his son, nearly everyone in contact with Fleming seems to have a motive - and an opportunity. Inspector Lynley and his partner, Barbara Havers, are called in from Scotland Yard to help the local police force. They find a torment of twisted familial relationships and broken dreams - and as he brings the murderer to justice, Lynley must bear the weight of his own conscience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

George writes of the both t h e bitter complexity of family life and gut wrenching love that parenting brings with salty wisdom and tender warmth : Lynely and Havers become more honest in work friendship, sharing bits of home so the kind affection nd respect between them grows / glows. It's a good thing the reader has that for comfort because the sharp edges of broken lives and horror of coke driven prostitution slice the narrative with "real" life vignettes. George holds back none of the

grief a degenerative brings...And what of Lady Helen....well, the romance's fate we cannot tell, Can we?

Like meditation and crossword puzzles, Elizabeth George is good for the mind. This one is different (as they all are) and stands out for having a first person narrative as part of the plot. The way this mystery plays out and how everything ties together is particularly satisfying. I always have my pencil nearby when I'm reading George because there's a phrase or a word I need to remember, or a character I can't keep straight, or an angle I want to look up. I discovered the Inspector Lynley series during this past long cold winter here in the Pennsylvania snow belt. What a literary delight! Funny and dark at the same time, mind boggling, complex and interconnected.. find a soft chair, grab your favorite beverage and dig into this one.

Well and intriguingly plotted. Soon found the numerous pages devoted to the early years of Miriam's daughter and the senile years of Barbara's mother tedious, because they did little to advance the plot. Elizabeth George creates fine characters but seems to fall in love with her minor characters--and not only in this book. I was a bit put off by the her common use of "aggravate" instead of the simpler "annoy," and I wish all writers (and translators) would replace "due to the fact that" with "because."

If cricket is in the background of this novel, other games are developing under the reader's eyes. Some of the suspects here look more like victims than villains. The victim himself, a beloved cricket champion, was more stable with his bat than with women or his all too often neglected children. His attempt at regulating his life will ironically lead to tragedy. Built like a complex jigsaw puzzle where tortured characters seem to further disassemble the pieces, *Playing for the Ashes* is as much a literary mystery as it is a classic whodunit. One reader mentions that the characters here are unsympathetic, implying that this fact alone weakens the qualities of the novel. I would like to respond with what one politician answered another during a presidential campaign some twenty years ago, "If you want a friend, get a dog." Reading is not necessarily about making friends or feeling warm and fuzzy. Centuries of literature will confirm this. I suppose aforementioned reader is alluding mostly to Olivia, a character to whom George gives the first person narrative at various intervals. The novel thus navigates between first and third person narration. Handled by some less talented, less experienced author, these acrobatics could endanger the plot. Here, they deepen the mystery,

adding to it a disturbing yet intriguing quality, and in the end allowing the reader to see the extraordinary evolution of Olivia, from rebellious and apparently indifferent, to compassionate and courageous. As her diseased body is becoming increasingly unresponsive, forcing her into unnatural humility, her soul (her passion) grows accordingly. All this while being a suspect. That's what I meant when I stated earlier that some suspects here look more like victims than villains. Among all the victims/suspects, Olivia might be the most poignant in this literary journey. Olivia is a journey. Another captivating aspect of *Ashes* is the way George depicts inner conflicts and solitudes (our inner ashes), not only with suspects, but with Detectives Lynley and Havers as well. Even in a marginal plot involving Barbara Havers's new neighbor, a little girl living with her father (with a mother abroad and not expected to be back for the kid's upcoming birthday?), we witness the solitude of a child. And, in many ways and with several characters, abandonment. This abandonment is manifest in various ways: some characters are or feel abandoned by loved ones; others abandon their law-abiding selves in the name of compassion and principle. There are those who save animals abandoned to the cruelty of human science, and those who feel abandoned or, at least, isolated by the snobbery of their highborn milieu. The scene when Barbara cooks a humble omelette in her humble abode for her aristocratic boss who is in no hurry to leave illustrates this quest for real companionship. Opposite to that are the sexy little episodes with Lynley's pretty yet useless girlfriend, pardon, fiancée now. Will she last? Only if she's mentioned on occasion, in my view, or is she is developed into something less superficial. What she does here is add levity to the story, but the story is not asking for levity. Reading Elizabeth George is not reading Danielle Steel, so let's not mix things up. This is a bit of a distraction, an interlude, but certainly not an enrichment to the plot. As it is, *Ashes* is a powerful novel. Without the insignificant romance, it could have lost its Achilles' heel.

I have read all of the Lynley novels over many years, as they have come out. I recently began reading the series in order from the beginning and enjoyed doing so until I came to "Playing for the Ashes." Dreary is the best word to describe the book. The narrative about Lynley and Havers is interspersed with dreary first person accounts by one of the characters, Olivia. These segments are dark, dreary segments which seem to go on forever. The basic plot is good but it is hard to maintain interest. I strongly suspect that Ms George started the book with an interesting plot and did not have enough text to please her publisher so she chose to pad the book out with the first person Olivia segments. There really no significant developments among the continuing characters so those who

wish to read the series in order should feel free to skip this volume.

I enjoyed the book, but thought it was too fragmented without enough attention given to Inspector Lynley and the solving of the crime. I would have liked the book better if it were about 200 pages shorter. Nothing would have been sacrificed by condensing the story, in my opinion.

This book, as other reviewers have said, has many characters with a couple subplots unfolding as we read. I was surprised and put off by a kind of dark, kinky undertone from a couple of characters. It seemed a bit forced, like George was trying to be less Agatha Christie like, so she inserted some stuff that would make Miss Marple faint. Still, a good mystery, and the friendship between Havers and Lynley continues to grow. We see the conflict between Lynley wanting to marry Lady Helen, but finding his courtship always interrupted by the demands of his career.

I did not enjoy this at all

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